

TOM LEE
President



Harold McLean
Public Counsel

STATE OF FLORIDA OFFICE OF PUBLIC COUNSEL

C/O THE FLORIDA LEGISLATURE
111 WEST MADISON ST.
ROOM 812
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399-1400
850-488-9330

EMAIL : OPC_WEBSITE@LEG.STATE.FL.US
WWW.FLORIDAOPC.GOV

ALLAN BENSE
Speaker



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tallahassee—Governor Jeb Bush has signed into law a bill passed by the Florida Legislature in its most recent session that is intended to expand Florida's Lifeline telephone service to thousands of additional customers.

Currently, existing regulations limit Lifeline Telephone Service discounts to households with income at or below 125% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, or those who participate in low income assistance programs such as Food Stamps. The new statute increases Lifeline income eligibility criteria to 135% of the poverty guidelines and also includes protections for existing and new Lifeline recipients from disconnection or denial of their service due to unrelated charges on their bill.

The new statute increases the maximum income level to 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. That means that Florida customers whose household incomes are less than \$17,320 per year are eligible for a monthly credit of up to \$13.50 per month for Lifeline Telephone Service. Lifeline Telephone Service credits of up to \$30.00 are also available to eligible customers in order to make initial service connection charges more affordable.

The Lifeline Telephone Service program was first introduced in Florida in 1995 and it has expanded through the years to presently serve over 150,000 low income telephone customers. Applications for the service can be obtained through local telephone companies for those customers who qualify based on participation in low income assistance programs, or through the Office of Public Counsel for those customers who may qualify under the income guidelines.

"We are very pleased that the Legislature has passed and the Governor has approved this new legislation that will expand Lifeline Service eligibility," stated Florida Public Counsel Harold McLean. "Only a fraction of existing households

in Florida who are qualified for Lifeline assistance are actually enrolled in the program today. We hope to change that, and the new statute will help,” he added.

The income eligibility program for Lifeline is a sliding scale based on the Federal poverty guidelines. A single person household with less than \$12,919 of annual income will qualify for Lifeline credits. For each additional member, the allowable income is increased by \$4401. Following are the maximum total allowable incomes for specific households:

One Occupant	\$12,919
Two Occupants	\$17,320
Three Occupants	\$21,721
Four Occupants	\$26,122

Consumers who wish to qualify for Lifeline Telephone Service should contact their local telephone company. Consumers who qualify for Lifeline under the income eligibility guidelines should call the Office of Public Counsel, 1-800-540-7039.